

الإنسان، الخطية، والغفران

Humanity, Sin & Salvation In Islam and Christianity

Article Three: Original Sin in Islam

Introduction

Two misconceptions shape the Islamic concept of Adam's sin. **First**, the belief that prophets do not sin. This subject could be addressed in another article. But it will be partially answered here in discussing the sin of Adam, since he is a prophet of Islam. We will see from the Qur'anic and Hadith evidence that Adam did sin. **Second**, the belief that Adam's sin was small, only forgetfulness. But the words and expressions that are used of sin in the Qur'an and Hadith show the contrary. How then can we communicate the issue of Adam's sin in a way that Muslims can understand?

One of the most common expressions that we Arabs use is *Ya Beni Adam* 'O son of Adam' (يا بني آدم). This term is used in the Qur'an and the Hadith of human beings in general because of the relationship of the human race to Adam. So in some sense there is the recognition that we have inherited our human nature from Adam. We will discuss the evidence from the Qur'an and the Hadith, and then suggest ways of communicating the concept of original sin to Muslims.

I. Adam and the Children of Adam in the Qur'an

The following verses present and explain the Qur'anic view of the sin of Adam:

O Children of Adam! Let not Satan seduce (لا يفتنكم) you as he caused your (first) parents to go forth (اخرج) from the Garden and tore off from them their robe (of innocence) that he might manifest their shame to them. Lo! He seeth you, he and his tribe, from whence ye see him not. Lo! We have made the devils protecting friends for those who believe not." (Pickthall) 7:27

This verse is loaded! **Seduce** is a strong verb and is used many times in the Qur'an to mean sin. Also the exit from the Garden of Eden is a great punishment. The loss of innocence implies more than just forgetfulness. The whole issue of shame and nakedness is an issue to be discussed in another article.

We said: "O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will; but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression. (Yusuf Ali) And We said: O Adam! Dwell

thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat ye freely (of the fruits) thereof where ye will; but come not nigh this tree lest ye become **wrong-doers**. (Pickthall) 2:35

We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he **forgot**: and We found on his part no firm resolve." (Yusuf Ali) And verily We made a covenant of old with Adam, but he **forgot**, and We found no constancy in him. (Pickthall) 20:115

This is the only verse upon which Muslims build their theology against original sin. There is a hermeneutic rule which is Islamic as well as Christian, i.e. "Do not explain the whole with the part." Which means do not use a single verse to define a doctrine, but use the totality of the context.

Then Adam received from his Lord words (of revelation), and he **relented toward him**. Lo! He is the relenting, the Merciful. (Pickthall) 2:37

This is the verse that is used to explain that God forgave him for his sin, so settling the matter. It does not explain his leaving the garden and is not explained by the Hadith references.

Then We said: 'O Adam! Verily, this is an enemy to thee and thy wife: so let him not get you both out of the Garden, so that thou art **landed in misery**.' (Yusuf Ali) 20:117

But Satan whispered evil to him: he said, 'O Adam! Shall I lead thee to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that never decays?' (Yusuf Ali) 20:120

In the result, they both ate of the tree, and so their **nakedness appeared to them**: they began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden: thus

did Adam **disobey** his Lord, and allow himself to be **seduced**. (Yusuf Ali) Then they twain ate thereof, so that their **shame** became apparent unto them, and they began to hide by heaping on themselves some of the leaves of the Garden. And Adam **disobeyed** his Lord, so **went astray**. (Pickthall) 20: 121

This is an important verse because it shows disobedience and succumbing to seduction. I have discussed many of the instances where these two sins are mentioned and how they were treated.

As I talk to Muslims they say Adam only forgot and Allah forgave him. So they use only one verse, 20:115, as the major interpretation and then 2:27 to show that Allah forgave him. Unfortunately they do not look at the other evidences. I have taken the two words that are used and did a word study of the usage of them in the rest of the Qur'an.

A. The first is **Disobey** (العصيان)

But those who **disobey** God and His Apostle and transgress His limits will be admitted to a Fire, to abide therein: And they shall have a humiliating punishment (Yusuf Ali) And whoso **disobeyeth** Allah and His messenger and **transgresseth** His limits, He will make him enter Fire, where he will dwell for ever; his will be a shameful doom. (Pickthall) 4:14

We see from this verse the consequences of disobeying God and his apostle.

And when Our clear revelations are recited unto them, they who look not for the meeting with Us say: 'Bring a Lecture other than this, or change it.' Say (O Muhammad): 'It is not for me to change it of my accord. I only follow that which is

inspired in me. Lo! If I disobey my Lord I fear the retribution of an awful Day.' (Pickthall) 10:15

In this verse we can see the response of the prophet of Islam to disobeying God.

He said: 'O my people! Do ye see? If I have a Clear (Sign) from my Lord and He hath sent Mercy unto me from Himself,—who then can help me against God if I were to disobey Him? What then would ye add to my (portion) but perdition?' (Yusuf Ali) 11:63

Unless I proclaim what I receive from God and His Messages: for any that disobey God and His Apostle,—for them is Hell: they shall dwell therein for ever. (Yusuf Ali) 72:23

This seems to be more emphatic in its punishment for disobedience.

And know that the messenger of Allah is among you. If he were to obey you in much of the government, ye would surely be in trouble; but Allah hath endeared the faith to you and hath beautified it in your hearts, and hath made disbelief and lewdness and rebellion hateful unto you. Such are they who are the rightly guided. (Pickthall) 49:7

B. The Second is Err (Al Ghaai الغي)

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error (الغي): whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things. (Yusuf Ali) There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error (الغي). And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm

handhold, which will never break. Allah is Hearer, Knower. (Pickthall) 2:256

He said: Now, because Thou hast sent me astray (الغي), verily I shall lurk in ambush for them on Thy Right Path. (Pickthall) 7:16

But their brethren (the evil ones) plunge them deeper into error (الغي) and never relax their efforts. (Yusuf Ali) 7:202

Recite unto them the tale of him to whom We gave Our revelations, but he sloughed them off, so Satan overtook him and he became of those who lead astray (الغاوين). (Pickthall) 7:175

II. Adam in the Hadith

Some people will say to some others, 'Go to Adam.' So they will go to Adam and say to him, 'You are the father of mankind; Allah created you with His Own Hand and breathed into you His Spirit (meaning the spirit which he created for you); and ordered the angels to prostrate before you. So (please) intercede for us with your Lord. Don't you see in what state we are? Don't you see what condition we have reached?' Adam will say, 'Today my Lord is angry, as He has never been before, nor will ever be thereafter. He forbade me (to eat of the fruit of) the tree but I disobeyed Him. Myself! Myself! Myself! (I have more need for intercession). Go to someone else; go to Noah.' Al-Bukhari 6:236, Abu Hurayrah

Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said, "Adam and Moses met, and Moses said to Adam, 'You are the one who made people miserable and turned them out of Paradise'. Adam said to him, 'You are the one whom Allah selected for His message and whom He selected for Himself and to

whom He revealed the Torah.' Moses said, 'Yes.' Adam said, 'Did you find that written in my fate before my creation?' Moses said, 'Yes.' So Adam overcame Moses with this argument. **Al-Bukhari 6:260**, Abu Hurayrah

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Adam and Moses argued with each other. Moses said to Adam, 'O Adam! You are our father who disappointed us and turned us out of Paradise.' Then Adam said to him, 'O Moses! Allah favoured you with His talk (talked to you directly) and He wrote (the Torah) for you with his Own hand. Do you blame me for my action, which Allah had written in my fate forty years before my creation?' So Adam confuted Moses" the Prophet (peace be upon him) added, repeating the statement three times. **Al-Bukhari 8:611**, Abu Hurayrah

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, 'The first man to be called on the Day of Resurrection will be Adam who will be shown his offspring, and it will be said to them, 'This is your father, Adam.' Adam will say (responding to the call). 'Labbayk and Sa'dayk.' Then Allah will say (to Adam), 'Take from your offspring the people of Hell.' Adam will say, 'O Lord, how many should I take?' Allah will say, 'Take ninety-nine out of every hundred.'" They (the Prophet's companions) said, "O Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him)! If ninety-nine out of every hundred of us are taken away, what will remain?" He said, "My followers in comparison with the other nations are like a white hair on a black ox." **Al-Bukhari 8:536**, Abu Hurayrah

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "On the Day of Resurrection Allah will say, 'O Adam!' Adam will reply, 'Labbayk, our Lord, and Sa'dayk' Then there will be a loud call (saying), 'Allah orders you to take from among your offspring a mission for the (Hell) Fire.' Adam will say, 'O Lord! Who are the mission for the (Hell) Fire?' Allah will say, 'Out of each thousand, take out 999.' At that time every pregnant female shall drop her load (have a miscarriage) and a child will have grey hair. 'And you shall see mankind as in a drunken state, yet not drunk, but severe will be the torment of Allah.' (22:2) (When the Prophet, peace be upon him, mentioned this), the people were so distressed (and afraid) that their faces paled whereupon the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, 'From Gog and Magog nine hundred ninety nine (999) will be taken out and one from you. You Muslims (compared to the large number of other people) will be like a black hair on the side of a white ox, or a white hair on the side of a black ox, and I hope that you will be one-fourth of the people of Paradise.' On that, we said, 'AllahuAkbar!' Then he said, 'I hope that you will be) one-third of the people of Paradise.' We again said, 'AllahuAkbar!' Then he said, '(I hope that you will be) one-half of the people of the Paradise.' So we said, 'AllahuAkbar.' **Al-Bukhari 6:265**, Abu Said Al Khudari

I heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) saying, 'If the son of Adam (the human being) had two valleys of money, he would wish for a third, for nothing can fill the belly of Adam's son except dust, and Allah

forgives him who repents to Him.' **Al-Bukhari 8:444**, Abdullah Ibn Abbas

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, would gather the people. The believers would stand until the Paradise is brought near them. They would come to Adam and say: 'O our father, open Paradise for us.' He would say: 'What turned ye out from Paradise was the sin of your father, Adam. I am not in a position to do that; you should go to my son, Ibrahim, the Friend of Allah.'" He (the Holy Prophet) said: "He (Ibrahim) would say: 'I am not in a position to do that. Verily I had been the Friend (of Allah) from a long time ago; you should approach Moses (peace be upon him) with whom Allah conversed.' They would come to Moses (peace be upon him) but he would say: 'I am not in a position to do that; you should go to Jesus, the Word of Allah and His spirit.' Jesus (peace be upon him) would say: 'I am not in a position to do that.' So they would come to Muhammad (peace be upon him). He would then be permitted (to open the door of Paradise). Muslim 0380, Abu Hurayrah & Hudhayfa

It is very clear from the Qur'anic and Hadith evidence that Adam knew of his sin and still laments what he did. The relationship between Adam and his descendants is also clear by the way Allah talks to him about them. Adam even admits that he is responsible for the human race predicament. These verses show abundantly clearly that the sin of Adam affects the whole human race and give abundant evidence of the

sinfulness of the sons of Adam right from the beginning.

III. Sharing with Muslims

Understanding how the Muslims think and believe will, I hope, help to correct the one-sided view. We can use this material to show that there is enough evidence, even in the Muslim sources, to support what Christians say. It is also important to understand the role of shame in the Islamic treatment of this issue. We tend to emphasize guilt more than shame. But there is enough evidence in the Bible also that treats the shame aspect of sin.

I have presented the sin of Adam to Muslims within the shame context, using two stories. The first is about an unmarried daughter who became pregnant. What should our response be? Well this is her problem, why should we pay for her sin? It is not fair? Or do we, as an Arab family, suffer her shame as a whole family? We are united as one family in both shame and honour. The other story is about a father who was jailed for the crime of stealing. How could we say that his problem is not the family's? After all he is the head of the family. Then I explain in both stories the relationship that we have with Adam. After all we use the expression *beni Adam* (بنی آدم) often in the religious arena as well as the public one.

إلى اللقاء يا بني آدم

Till we meet again, O sons of Adam.
Abu Atallah

THE TRANSLATIONAL MODEL FOR MISSION IN RESISTANT MUSLIM SOCIETY: A CRITIQUE AND AN ALTERNATIVE (II)

by Sam Schlorff

II—An Alternative Model for Mission in Resistant Muslim Society:

the Betrothal Model

When the idea of a dynamic equivalence church was first propounded I was intrigued. Although concerned by ambiguities that I saw, I was open to having my reservations proven unfounded. Certainly, one could hardly fault the use of the model in Bible translation, even though one may on occasion criticize a particular translation choice. It has become increasingly clear, however, that my apprehensions have turned out to be well founded. I am concerned for the future of evangelical mission work among Muslims if numbers of missionaries continue to follow this model.

In *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969), the classic work on dynamic equivalence Bible translation, Nida and Taber lay down extensive rules designed to safeguard both faithfulness to the intent of the original text as well as contextual equivalence. Unfortunately, the proponents of dynamic equivalence Muslim churches have not provided such safeguards. What follows might be considered a corrective of the model in that it proposes rules designed to ensure faithfulness to the Scriptural ideal of the church, as well as to contextual relevance. It is really a distinct model, however, so I

prefer to call it *The Betrothal Model*, a name inspired by the following passage penned by the Apostle Paul.

I am jealous for you [i.e. the church of Corinth] with a godly jealousy. *I promised [betrothed] you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.* But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (I Cor. 11:2-3. NIV)

In the Apostle's day (and even today) in the Middle East, it was the parents or legal guardians who negotiated the marriage of the young couple. And once the marriage agreement was solemnly contracted, the two were considered married before the law even though the two had not yet lived together (as in Matt. 1:19). Note that the Apostle compares the role of the church planter to that of the parents or guardians; it is to "betroth" the young church to Christ, to bring her into a position of full commitment to Him. In this perspective, it would be quite improper for the convert church, the "Bride of Christ," whether individually or collectively, to flirt with its old religious system (Islam) by continuing

to practice the ritual prayer and other Muslim acts of worship.

In proposing an alternative model, I shall contest nearly every element of the Translational Model as set forth in my first article. My purpose is not simply to analyze the flaws in the model nor to criticize or attack anyone, but rather to propose something better. If in my zeal I have been unkind to someone, I apologize. I shall begin with a look at the causes of Muslim resistance, and then summarize the main elements of the alternative model that I am proposing. Within the limits of this study it will not, however, be possible to supply more than the most elementary biblical data in support of the model.

A. The Main Cause of Muslim Resistance

Is it true that "missionary extractionism" is the fundamental reason for Muslim resistance to the gospel? I reject the theory. I am not denying that "extractionism" exists. Nor do I deny that missionaries have often imported Western practices into the young church, and have sometimes encouraged converts to leave their culture. I would moreover wholeheartedly agree that we need to pay greater attention to the cultural dimension of the task, and that contextualization is "a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the Word" (Nicholls 1979:21). What I am calling into question is the claim that missionaries are the *main perpetrators* of extractionism, and that "missionary" extractionism is the *main cause* of Muslim resistance.

Let me explain. First of all, the theory grossly exaggerates the *extent* of "missionary extractionism." In my experience in the Arab World, missionaries have *rarely, if ever*, "demanded that converts turn against their culture" as the theory claims. The distinction between what is explicitly Islamic and what is generic Arab culture shared by Arab Christians and Muslims alike, is important here. We *have* rejected what is distinctly Islamic, and have often failed adequately to contextualize, but we have not rejected Arab culture *per se*. Our principal failure is helping converts relate their new faith to their culture. Second, the theory does not really explain the extractionism that does exist, or Muslim resistance itself. The missionary importation of Western culture is certainly not unique to the Muslim World, but for the most part it has not caused the kind of resistance elsewhere that we see in the Muslim World. Clearly, there must be a better explanation for Muslim resistance. But the most serious charge I have against the theory is that it ignores what is obviously the main cause of extractionism, and adopts an explanation that leads young missionaries to try to counteract extractionism in ways that are counterproductive.

The Ideological Nature of Islamic Society

Muslim resistance is attributable mainly to the ideological nature of Islamic society. To adapt the famous phrase of Abraham Lincoln, Islam is a society dedicated to the proposition that *all*

men are created to live in submission to God, as prescribed by "God's Law"—the *Shariah* (see Schlorff 1993:174ff). Ensuring that all citizens conform to the *Shariah* is one of the main functions of the Islamic State. Given this ideal, the *Shariah* had to make provision for non-Muslims. The principal legal provisions to note are the *dhimmi* (or *zimmi*) system and the Law of Apostasy (see e.g. Doi 1979; Gibb & Kramers 1953:75, 91, 245, 413, 570 (#VII); Shahid 1992).

The Dhimmi System

The *dhimmi* system segregates non-Muslims from the majority community (the *Ummah*). *Dhimmis* are in reality second-class citizens. They are forced to live under certain legal disabilities. Male *dhimmis* must pay a special tribute (the *djizya*), as well as a special land tax when they own land. A Muslim man may marry a *dhimmiya*, but a Muslim woman may not marry a *dhimmi*. It is interesting that Muslims consider the system "tolerant." But the reality experienced by *dhimmis* is quite the opposite (Betts 1978:10).

The effects of the *dhimmi* system on churches in the Muslim world are noteworthy. It has produced what has been called "Christian Ghetto" type churches (Moffett 1987:481ff; see Barkat 1978). Each church or denomination (called a *millet*) represents "a state within the state" that is ruled by its own leader in religious and civil matters, but segregated from the Muslim majority and subject to the Muslim State in wider matters. The *dhimmi* church is thus subjugated and repressed, while overt evangelism

among the majority is made difficult. It has also tended to respond defensively, 1) by raising language barriers (i.e. using a distinctive religious language in Bible translation and Christian literature that Muslims find hard to understand—Khair Ullah 1976: 305-309 & Abu Yaha 1986), and 2) by raising social barriers between Christians and Muslims (e.g. anti-Muslim myths and polemic, distrust of converts from Islam). These barriers, intended to preserve the church's identity and prevent defections, are quite understandable in the circumstances, but they do hinder the evangelization of Muslims. The above comments should not be taken as a criticism of these churches. They have my utmost sympathy. My purpose is simply to affirm as clearly as possible that the extractionism that we see in the *dhimmi* system is attributable to Islamic Law, and not to missionaries or national churches.

The Law of Apostasy

The *Law of Apostasy* (*Ridda*) is even more extractionist; in an ideological society where everyone must conform to the "Law of God," apostasy (defection from Islam) is seen as equivalent to sedition. What happens to the apostate is somewhat analogous to what we call "transplant rejection," where a transplanted organ triggers a rejection mechanism which must be treated medically or the patient will die. In ideological Islamic society, conversion to Christian faith triggers a similar rejection mechanism. According to the *Shariah*, an adult male apostate is to be

given opportunity to recant, failing which he must suffer the full severity of the Law. He is stripped of all civil rights, his marriage is declared null and void, his children are taken from him, his property becomes spoil to the Muslim community and anyone is free to kill him. Since his family is thereby dishonored, it is often a family member who does the dirty deed. The female apostate, by contrast, is to be imprisoned until she recants, however long that may take. Sometimes, she too is killed by her family. Often, one's only recourse is to seek refuge abroad. Earlier in the century, during the period of Muslim attraction to Western political ideals, Muslims who became Christians were often persecuted, but the full penalties of the Law Of Apostasy were seldom applied. Today however, with the return of the fundamentalist spirit, we are witnessing a return to the full severity of the Law of Apostasy.

To conclude, it is clearly the *Shariah*, especially the *dhimmi* system and the Law of Apostasy, that is responsible for the extraction of the Muslim convert from his culture. The effect of these two provisions may often be felt even in Muslim countries where they are not explicitly written into the constitution. Instead of blaming the previous generation of missionaries, the church planter in the Muslim World should familiarize himself with the ideological nature of Islamic society, and with the *dhimmi* system and the Law of Apostasy in particular, and be prepared realistically to work at counteracting their effect on the convert and the church.

The attempt of some Christians to appear as Muslim as possible is really counterproductive in the long run. Such an action is comparable to what the Qur'an calls hypocrisy (*nifâq*)—pretending to be Muslim but secretly working against Islam (Sherif 1985:87-89). I would agree with David Shenk when he writes in this connection:

It is wise for the church in mission in Muslim settings to function unobtrusively. It is important to attempt to function with a low profile and to work in convergence with the local culture as much as possible. But my judgment is that little is gained and perhaps much is lost when Christians identify with the Muslim community in ways that can easily be interpreted as undermining the internal integrity of the Muslim community. My judgment is that it is much easier for Muslims to tolerate the presence of Christians among them when the definitions of that Christian community are quite clear. This does not mean that the definitions of the community shall be obnoxious or noncontextual. But the Muslims must be able to know who the followers of Jesus are in distinction to those who seek to walk in the *sunnah* (customary practice) of Mohammed. (1994:16)

By ignoring the *dhimmi* system and the Law of Apostasy, the theory of "missionary" extractionism has encouraged younger missionaries to experiment in ways that can only be described as extreme. I am thinking here, e.g., of those who have felt that they should identify themselves in some way as "Muslim" rather than Christian (i.e. as Muslims who follow *'Isa*—see Racey

1996:304), and practice the five ritual prayers, the fast of Ramadan, and sometimes other practices, in more or less *the prescribed Muslim manner*. Having been told that missionaries are the cause of extractionism, which must be avoided at all costs, they quite naturally conclude that to be successful in church planting they must become as Muslim as possible, hopefully without going too far, and that converts must remain within Islam. For various reasons I cannot go into further details on their experiments, or provide documentation, except to say that I have collected published and unpublished reports which indicate that not a few have been involved. All of this is to say that if we are ever to solve the problem of Muslim resistance to the gospel, we have to begin with a correct understanding of its cause, as well as its effect on the church and on missionary work in Muslim lands. What is needed is research into the ways the *Shariah* and Muslim ideology have affected Muslim response to the gospel, and especially into ways we might counteract their effect.

B. The Objective of Mission to Muslims as Concerns the Church

What is the objective of mission to Muslims as concerns planting the church? Is the emergence of "a people movement to Christ that remains within Islam" a legitimate objective from the biblical perspective? My position is that, whereas heterodox Christian movements may well emerge from time to time as they have in the past, missionaries have no business

encouraging such movements or telling converts to stay in Islam. Sooner or later, the *ulemaa* will encounter such "Muslim Christians" and pressure them to return to true Islam. By the same token I would say that if we encounter such, it is our duty as missionaries to urge them, in the words of Elijah, to stop "wavering between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21).

Earlier, we saw that Wilder had proposed two possible scenarios for "people movements among Muslims" (1977:310). The first envisages "*a movement to Christ that remains within Islam*," the Muslim church idea that has been in the missiological limelight these past twenty years, and the second "*a new church of Muslim cultural orientation*," a concept which unfortunately he did not explore. I believe that the future of evangelical missions to Muslims lies in the second scenario rather than the first; in the remainder of this paper I shall attempt to define and give it form. In this scenario the objective is leading Muslims to faith in Christ, teaching them to be His disciples, and gathering them into distinctly Christian churches that retain social and cultural ties with Muslim society as much as possible, but without ostensibly remaining Muslim. There is a vast difference between the two visions of the church. But if this second scenario is to have any practical value, parameters are required such as exist for dynamic equivalence translation, especially a biblical approach to the evaluation of other religions (Islam in our case), and a biblical approach to contextualization and to cross-cultural hermeneutics.

C. A Biblical Theology of Non-Christian Religion

Are the forms or religious structures of Islam essentially "a neutral vehicle"? By way of reply, I draw your attention to J. H. Bavinck's approach to the theological evaluation of non-Christian religion in Chapter Nine of his book, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque* ([1966]). What follows is my adaptation of his approach. As bearers of the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), every human being possesses an intuitive knowledge of God and of His requirements of us (Rom. 1:18 to 2:16), which we call *general revelation*. Herein lies the origin of human culture. All cultures have an essentially religious nature and reflect the *imago dei* to a certain extent. But mankind is also cut off from the life of God and spiritually dead (Gen. 3:17-24; Eph 4:17-19). As a consequence of this, and of Satan's influence, all people to a greater or lesser extent *repress and suppress* general revelation, and exchange it for Untruth (Rom 1:18, 22-23, 25, 28). We see a kind of dialectic at work in human cultures; they reflect the existence of a genuine, albeit intuitive, knowledge of God and of His requirements in all mankind, but they also reflect our repression and suppression of that knowledge, and our rebellion against God. Christians are not exempt from this dialectic, but they have Christ within to break the vicious circle of repression and substitution.

Islam provides a good illustration of the cycle of sin, repression and suppression, substitution and more sin. Space limita-

tions allow only a few highlights, drawn mainly from a previously published study (Schlorff 1980). The qur'anic view of God, especially its doctrine of absolute transcendence, cuts the Muslim off from the knowledge of God which he or she has by means of general revelation, and from a "saving knowledge" of Christ. God appears to be so distant, essentially unknown and unknowable, and the Trinity in Unity impossible, because Islam has repressed the Truth about God and substituted for it Untruth. Islam has also repressed and suppressed the Truth about ourselves, our guilt before God, and our knowledge of God's requirements which we have through general revelation. It attributes our separation from God and our sinful condition to God's transcendence rather than to our sin, and considers our present condition to be normal rather than abnormal. The Qur'an teaches that we are basically good and able to do good; we are just "weak." The long-standing Muslim practice of distorting Christian teachings is another example of the suppression of Truth. Why, despite everything that has been done over the centuries to disabuse them of these ideas, do Muslims hold so tenaciously to the notions that Christians are tritheists, that they believe the polytheistic idea that Christ is the product of a carnal union between a god and a woman, and that they have corrupted the text of the "former Scriptures," etc.? It can only be because the Qur'an teaches them such falsehoods.

It is true that there is no culture so alienated from God as to be devoid of

all traces of the divine image. And there is no culture that cannot be sanctified and transformed into a channel for communicating God's grace to people. This holds for Muslim cultures as well. But because of the dialectic of sin and repression, and its consequences, one must also say that the forms and functions of Islamic culture are *not neutral* as concerns the relationship between man and God. At the very least, one must say that they are *ambivalent*. Some forms may be legitimately used as vehicles for communicating God's grace to Muslims. (Keep in mind also that forms we consider "Muslim" may be generically Middle Eastern, and not necessarily Islamic in origin or function.) On the other hand, some Muslim forms give clear expression to man's rebellion against God and must be avoided. If our contextual model is to be adequate to the task, therefore, it must be based on an appraisal of Islam that is realistic and biblical.

D. Starting Point for Contextualization

Is it appropriate to begin the process of contextualization from *within* Islam, on the assumption that Islam contains "moments" of Truth? May one use select passages of the Qur'an as sources of Truth for proclaiming the gospel, or fill Muslim ritual forms with Christian meanings? Here again, such an approach is to be rejected. There is of course a grain of truth in the idea, in that one may use old forms in new ways to communicate new ideas—but only under certain conditions. As it stands, however, the claim to fill old forms with *new* meanings is too sweeping, and

grossly simplistic and misleading. What is worse, it encourages ill-advised adventurism and the *misuse* of Muslim forms. The distinction between "faith-allegiance" and "religious structures" is a good example of misuse. Certainly, the two are to be distinguished, but this does not mean that in any given religious system they may be totally separated. Nor does it mean that the faith-allegiance of one system may be joined to the religious structures of another, like so many Lego blocks, without considerable semantic distortion and theological confusion.

The problem with this approach is that *it assumes that form may be divorced from meaning*. Paul Hiebert has written an important article that helps clarify the relationship of form to meaning (1989), and the significance of all this for contextualization. Among other things, he describes several serious dangers or flaws that are inherent in the attempt to separate form from meaning. I hasten to add that one really needs to read the entire article because it contains much more of value than could be summarized here.

First, the separation of form and meaning is based on a too simple view of culture. In this view, language is the basis of culture, and all other areas of culture can be understood by analogy to linguistics. But culture is more than language. It is made up of many symbol systems, such as rituals, gestures, life styles and technology. In these, ... the relationships between form and meaning are often complex.... People in other cultures will interpret what we say in terms of their own

cultural categories, and there is no way to test whether their ideas correspond with ours or not. (1989:105).

In the second place, a total separation of meaning and form tends to be asocial. It does not take seriously enough the fact that symbols are created and controlled by social groups and whole societies. As individuals and minority groups we may create our own symbols and words to express our faith in our own circles. When we try to reinterpret symbols used by the dominant society, however, we are in danger of being misunderstood and ultimately of being captured by its definitions of reality. (Ibid:106).

Third, to separate meaning and form is to ignore history. Words and other symbols have histories of previously established linkages between form and meaning. Without such historical continuity, it would be impossible for people to pass on their culture from one generation to the next or to preserve the gospel over time. We are not free to arbitrarily link meanings and forms. (Ibid:107).

[He concludes:] The greatest danger in separating meaning from form is the relativism and pragmatism this introduces. (Ibid:108).

I couldn't agree more! The following comparison of the single word to the sentence may be oversimplified, but it does illustrate the problem. When a word stands alone (a simple form) it may take any one of several possible meanings. The tie between form and meaning is loose, and by itself it usually does not convey a message. The word *fast*, for example, is a word that can have several meanings. Use it in a sentence (a complex form), however,

and its meaning becomes definite and fixed, as in: *the boat stuck fast on the sandbar; the fast was now already past; he was fast asleep in the stern*, and so on. *As far as the sentence is concerned, then, form cannot be divorced from meaning.*

The same holds for religious ritual, such as the acts of worship in Islam and the Sacraments in Christianity. Made up of a number of gestures (= simple forms), rituals are complex forms that function in some respects like audio-visual sentences that convey very graphic and powerful messages within the communities that perform them. The Muslim ritual prayer is a good example; at the very least, one can say that it portrays the Muslim ideal of submission to God, even though most of the components of the prayer ritual (standing, bowing, prostrating, kneeling, and chanting religious texts) may be adapted from Christianity (see Woodberry 1989b:285-303).

Those who start from within Islam try to defend the approach by appealing to biblical precedent. It is said that God, through His Prophets and Apostles, used first the Canaanite/Hebrew language and cultural context and later the Greek language and cultural context, both quite pagan, as mediums for His self-revelation and for forming the covenant community. However, they then make the gratuitous assumption that God used these cultures as a source of *theological* Truth, or accepted their pagan religious structures as legitimate expressions of faith-allegiance to Himself. This is the grounds given to justify filling Muslim forms with Christian meanings. I contest the

assumption. Unfortunately, to examine the biblical data would require a separate article. Suffice it to say here that the biblical authors followed the approach described below.

The contextual approach recommended here follows from the above view of Islam. Because of the repression and substitution inherent in Islam, the Qur'an and Islamic culture cannot be considered a neutral vehicle that may be used as a *contextual or theological starting point*, or source of Truth, and filled with Christian meanings. These are used only as a *communicational starting point* to help the receptors connect to the biblical message. "From a strictly theological point of view there is no point within [Islam] which offers an unripe truth that can be simply taken over and utilized as a basis for Christian witness" (Bavinck 1960:140). Neither are there neutral "religious structures" (such as the ritual prayer) that may be joined to Christian faith-allegiance in the young church without creating serious semantic distortion and theological confusion.

As with dynamic equivalence Bible translation, however, procedural rules and principles need to be spelled out to ensure that the message communicated is faithful to the Scriptures, as well as relevant to the context. This brings us to the question as to which hermeneutical approach best accords with the other components of our model as we seek to interpret the gospel in a Muslim society.

E. Cross-Cultural Hermeneutic

The hermeneutical method used to interpret the Scriptures across cultures

is the central component of the model. Cross-cultural hermeneutics in a Muslim society include not just the way we interpret the Bible and the Christian faith and life, but also the way we interpret the Qur'an and Islamic culture when we use these in communicating the gospel to Muslims. This complicates things considerably. The way we interpret the Qur'an in interacting with Muslims impinges on the authority of Scripture itself. In my study of the various ways Protestant missionaries have interpreted the Qur'an over the years, I have found that these naturally divide into two broad, contrasting cross-cultural approaches, which I have called *synthesis* and *analysis*.¹ The approach that begins the process within Islam represents a *hermeneutic of synthesis*; that is, it interprets the Bible and Christianity in relation to the Qur'an and Islam in such a way as to bring the two perspectives closer together into a kind of dialectical unity. I am convinced that this approach to cross-cultural hermeneutics is unbiblical. It is unwise to try to read the gospel into the Qur'an, or reinterpret qur'anic passages in such a way as to give them biblical meanings. It is likewise unwise to try to give Christian meanings to Muslim ritual forms, such as the ritual prayer. Such approaches only create confusion. In saying this, I am not rejecting contextualization *per se*, but rather the notion that contextualization necessarily involves *synthesis*.

What I recommend instead is a *hermeneutic of analysis*. Rather than trying to merge the perspectives of the two

books and religions, the analytic approach seeks to understand each in terms of its own categories of thought and its own cultural context. Basically the same hermeneutical principles are used for both books. Appropriate linguistic and cultural forms from Islamic culture are used as a cultural vehicle for communicating the biblical message, but only in a way that does not do violence to the original meanings of those forms. As a matter of principle there is no attempt to merge the biblical and qur'anic perspectives. Although respect is shown the Qur'an, there can be no ambiguity as to which book is the Word of God. This approach to contextualization may seem like walking a tight-rope, but I maintain that it is the only way to use the Qur'an and Islamic culture in a way that does not do violence to the gospel.

To illustrate the difference between *synthesis* and *analysis*, take the first Surah of the Qur'an (*al-fâtiha*) which is recited in Arabic at the start of every ritual prayer. Some Christians view it as a prayer that they too could pray. But to view it that way is to take the approach of *synthesis*; it reads Christian meanings into the passage. Since the words appear to be very much like words Christians use in prayer, it is assumed that they mean what we take them to mean, without consideration for what they mean in the Islamic context. The analytic approach, by contrast, looks at the passage in terms of the Qur'an's own categories of thought, and finds that it actually means something quite different. The

phrase "the Straight Way" (vs.5), for example, reminds us of similar phrases in the Psalms (e.g. 5:8; 27:11) that refer to righteous living. When we compare the phrase with other passages in the Qur'an however (e.g. 3:51) we find that "the Straight Way" is actually another term for Islam itself. The "bottom line" is that if you recite the Sura and repeat "guide me in the Straight Way," you are actually asking God to lead you to adopt the way of Islam!

Let us now look at some of the procedural rules that need to be added so as to ensure faithfulness to the Scriptures, as well as relevance to the Muslim context. First of all, applying what Hiebert has called the social and historical dimensions of symbols, one should avoid the use of forms that have a history of very close ties to the Islamic worldview and worship. In an article on the use of Arabic terms in Bible translations for Muslims, Kenneth Thomas concludes that one should avoid terms and phraseology that both Christians and Muslims recognize to be of exclusively Islamic origin or usage (1989:104). I am suggesting that the principle applies not just to Bible translation, but also to the way we do theology in context and make use of Muslim religious structures.

A **second** and related rule is that when using Islamic terms or cultural forms, one should be careful to remain within the semantic range that the form has historically had in its Islamic context, rather than trying to reinterpret it or read into it some "Christian" meaning. Otherwise the Muslim will misinterpret

what you are trying to say, as Hiebert has wisely warned (see also Carson 1985:203-206 for helpful ideas on the limits of dynamic equivalence.)

Third, when citing one of the many qur'anic points of contact with Scripture in our witness to Muslims (e.g. Adam's expulsion from the Garden, or the qur'anic title for Jesus—*kalimatullah* "Word of God," etc.), it is important to distinguish the biblical from the qur'anic interpretation of the point in question. David Shenk proposes that you invite the Muslim to interpret for you what the Qur'an has to say on the subject, and then share with them what the Bible has to say. Never forget that the Qur'an *does not give witness to the gospel* (Shenk 1993:44f).

Fourth, we must respect the central role of the believing community and its hermeneutical tradition in the contextual process (Nicholls 1979:51). Here is where Paul Hiebert's suggested procedure for helping the young church contextualize in a way that is both faithful to Scripture and culturally relevant is so helpful (1987:109-110). Noting that the church has the knowledge of the culture that is needed, and the missionary is the one most likely to have the necessary knowledge of Scripture and "metacultural framework," Hiebert proposes a four-step process to what he calls "critical contextualization." It begins with 1) the study of the local culture; the believers collect information on the traditional beliefs and customs and meanings relative to the question at hand. This is followed by 2) studying together the biblical

perspective on the question, then 3) critically evaluating together the cultural form(s) in the light of what the Scriptures teach, and finally 4) coming to a conclusion together as to the customs and rituals that the young church will use to express the biblical view. It seems to me that this is the kind of approach that is needed to help the church avoid the pitfalls associated with the uncritical adoption of Muslim forms.

To illustrate how this procedure might work, let us say that a group of converts is seeking God's will concerning the forms of worship and prayer it will use in public. They study Muslim prayer and its significance to Muslims, and note that in the prayer ritual (standing, bowing, prostrating, etc.) one of the main things that is visually acted out is the worshipper's submission to God. In this connection, they find that Muslims believe that an act performed as prescribed in "God's Law" is somehow magically transformed into the ideal that is symbolized; i.e. performing the prayer turns one into a person who is in submission to God—and pleasing to Him. As one Muslim put it, "It is man's works, his actualization of divine will on earth as it is in heaven, that constitutes redemption" (al-Faruqi 1968:69). When they compare this to the Christian view of worship (including the Sacraments) and prayer, however, they discover that there is nothing in common between the two. Probably the main focus of Christian worship in its various forms is the celebration, with praise and thanksgiving to God, of the redemption that He

has given us freely in Christ Jesus. The performance ethos of Islamic worship is inimical to this idea of worship, and it is naive to think that one can make it mean anything but what it has always meant to Muslims.

One cannot predict, of course, how the young church might decide concerning its worship practices. Its worship *may* look Islamic in some respects, e.g. if it uses a liturgy, and retains such forms as bowing and kneeling. But if it is faithfully taught what the Word says about worship, its worship cannot help but be quite distinct from the Muslim ritual prayer. I believe Parshall is quite right when he says there could not be "continued involvement in prayers at the mosque" (1985:184). But I am also convinced that, if it is taught well, the young church will also find itself unable to perform the ritual prayer, even in modified form, in church or at home, because it is intrinsically incompatible with Christian worship.

More procedural rules are no doubt needed in addition to these. I leave the door open to you to propose those that you think should be included. (See the recent article by David Racey [1996] for his ideas on the matter).

F. Some Concluding Observations.

I conclude with several reflections on the implications of all this for church planting. A first observation is that we need to become much more aware of the different ways Muslim ideology and Muslim law impact the church planting process. My impression is that in Muslim countries where churches have continued to exist after Islam

came, church planting has been most affected by the *dhimmi* system, although the Law of Apostasy has certainly had its effect where there have been converts from Islam. But for church planting in countries where the church has died out or never existed it is the Law of Apostasy, not the *dhimmi* system, that has had the greatest impact. In the past, however, missionaries have often been woefully ignorant of Islamic Law on these matters. In North Africa where I served, some have had the notion that the church cannot be considered to exist "as long as no worshipping group has government recognition." Not only is such a notion unrealistic, it is offensive to North African Christians. Those with whom I have talked reject the notion of trying to obtain "government recognition," at least in the foreseeable future. This would mean applying for *dhimmi* status, with all that implies. And if they did apply, the government would almost certainly refuse, and then they would be in a worse situation than before! At present, North African Christians have the status of Muslims, as far as their "civil state" is concerned, and North African churches have no legal status at all.

Is the solution to push Muslim countries to accept the principle of religious pluralism? Certainly we should use every means at our disposal to work for greater justice and religious liberty for our Christian brothers and sisters in the Muslim World. Religious pluralism, however, is clearly incompatible with Muslim ideology. I am reminded of the lively discussion that took place at the

Christian-Muslim dialogue organized by the WCC at Chambesy, Switzerland (1976:427-452). The Christian side rather cautiously pleaded for religious pluralism, but the idea was vigorously rejected by the Muslims who expressed indignation at what they considered injustices, e.g. that the Muslims were a majority in Indonesia but their attempts to install a Muslim State had been thwarted. Clearly, it would be most unrealistic to count on Muslim countries accepting the principle of religious pluralism any time in the foreseeable future!

Having said that, I still believe that the traditional *dhimmi* type church is a viable option for the church planter in some parts of the Muslim world. Measures should be taken, however, to counteract the adverse effects of the *dhimmi* system on the church, and serious efforts made to contextualize in a sound manner. I note that some evangelical *dhimmi* churches in the Middle East are making a very commendable effort to reach their Muslim neighbors, despite the risks. On the other hand, I think that we also need seriously to consider the possibilities of the *underground house church*, or *cell church*, in the Muslim World. What is especially needed at the present time is a thorough study of the cell church / house church models and how they may be adapted, and used to good effect, in the Muslim World.

Finally, I wish to express the conviction that there is no "key that will unlock the door to the Muslim mind and heart" apart from what Christ gave us

in the very beginning. Certainly, as necessary as it may be, contextualization is not *the* key, whatever the contextual model that is followed. I firmly believe that what is required is giving faithful attention to fulfilling those foundational tasks our Lord gave us at the beginning: proclaiming the Good News (which includes Bible translation), discipling the new believers, gathering them into churches, and training leaders who will pass on to other disciples what they have learned. These are the real keys to success in church planting among Muslims, as elsewhere in the world.

1. For details see my unpublished Th.M. thesis, "The Missionary Use of the Qur'an: An Historical and Theological Study of the Contextualization of the Gospel" (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1984), pp39-116, 164-184.

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